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SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR EAP DAS MARCIEL,
DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MLS (BESTIC),
DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/RSP (RUNNING),
DOD FOR OSD-POLICY (STERN, SHUBERT),
DOD FOR DSCA (JENKINS),
PACOM FOR J52 (LACY, MA),
PACOM FOR J45 (NICHOLLS, SCHULER),
PACOM FOR PACAF/SGZ (CINCO, OH, PALMER),
PACOM FOR POLAD,
JPAC FOR MUNIPALLI,
PHNOM PENH ALSO FOR DATT (NORTON),
HANOI ALSO FOR DATT,
MARFORPAC FOR NOREN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [LA](#) [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: SERIES OF BREAKTHROUGHS WITH LAO MILITARY

REF: A. 07 VIENTIANE 0092

- [1](#)B. 07 VIENTIANE 0625
- [1](#)C. 07 VIENTIANE 0725
- [1](#)D. 07 VIENTIANE 0790
- [1](#)E. 07 VIENTIANE 0840
- [1](#)F. 07 VIENTIANE 0914
- [1](#)G. 08 VIENTIANE 0061
- [1](#)H. 08 VIENTIANE 0083

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Ambassador called on Ministry of National Defense (MND) Chief of Cabinet (Permanent Secretary) Brigadier General Sisophonh Bang-one-seng-det February 8 to deliver recently-received materials from the PACOM Chiefs of Defense Conference which BG Sisophonh had attended. At the meeting, BG Sisophonh provided answers to several pending mil-mil issues. The discussion included the pending first-ever exchange of Defense Attachs, English Language training (ELT) at the Defense Language Institute (DLI) for Lao military officers, a DLI survey of Lao ELT capabilities, and MND attendance at the Asia Pacific Military Medicine Conference (APMMC) in Singapore in April. Most interesting is the possibility that the two Lao MND officials named for DLI ELT will be the new Lao Defense Attache and his Deputy to be posted to the Lao Embassy in Washington, D.C. this summer.
End Summary.

English Language Training (ELT)

[1](#)2. (SBU) BG Sisophonh checked to ensure that DLI would be willing to offer two types of English language courses under the Interntional Military Education and Training (IMET) program for 2008: a two-month General English Course (scheduled for June 4-August 15) as well as a longer Language

Instructor Course. He then told the Ambassador unofficially that COL Khammy Labounthan, currently MND Deputy Chief of Cabinet, and MAJ Sonephet Phomlouangsy, currently a desk officer in the MND External Relations Department, have been selected to attend the General English Course (and not the follow-on Instructor Course). According to BG Sisophonh, COL Khammy -- previously a helicopter pilot trained on MI-8s and MI-17s -- has "some English," while MAJ Sonephet has studied in Australia. BG Sisophonh said he was happy with the June-August course dates for the two students. (COMMENT: Although BG Sisophonh did not say so explicitly, we believe it is likely that COL Khammy and MAJ Sonephet have been selected by MND to open the DATT Office in the Lao Embassy in Washington, D.C. following their English Language training. End Comment)

13. (SBU) DLI Survey: We mentioned that DLI wants to send a specialist to undertake an English language survey in Laos -- possibly during March. BG Sisophonh said that MND welcomed the specialist's visit. He added that the specialist could test the English language levels of COL Khammy and MAJ Sonephet before they go to DLI.

14. (SBU) BG Sisophonh inquired how many "scholarships" DLI would be able to provide Laos this year. (NOTE: DLI had originally discussed offering two Lao students both the General English Course followed by the Instructor Course. End Note.) Since MND was nominating COL Khammy and MAJ Sonephet only for the two-month General English Course, we told BG Sisophonh that funding for two slots at the six-month Instructor Course (August 18-February 20) might/might be separately available -- but we would have to check with DLI to be sure. The ability of two other students to go directly into the Instructor Course (without the General English

Course lead-in) would depend very much on their English language levels. This could be discussed with the DLI specialist. BG Sisophonh said he would be happy to have the DLI specialist coming to do a survey in March test the English levels of staff members to see if they would qualify for the Instructor training -- and MND would work to better prepare these staff members to be qualified for the Instructor course.

15. (SBU) Apparently interested in local English Language preparatory courses, BG Sisophonh asked the Ambassador generally about the Lao-American College (LAC). The Ambassador responded that this is a private college in Vientiane. He mentioned that the Embassy has provided some "scholarships" to send some local Lao officials for English language training courses at schools like the LAC. (NOTE: the Embassy Public Diplomacy Office has provided some grants to the Foreign Ministry's Institute of Foreign Affairs and to Lao National Radio to send some staff members to English language courses at two local schools -- although not actually at LAC. End Note.) BG Sisophonh said he would be interested in discussing this further. (COMMENT: BG Sisophonh appeared to have been hinting at a bit of pre-training for COL Khammy, MAJ Sonephet, and the two proposed English instructors. Since the local colleges charge something in the range of \$250/term per student, this may be well worth considering -- and finding a way to offer MND. End Comment.)

APMMC

16. (SBU) APMMC: BG Sisophonh announced that MND was pleased to accept PACOM's invitation for MND Medical Department Director General COL Dr. Bounteun Bandavong to attend the April Asia-Pacific Military Medicine Conference in Singapore with a second officer (to be identified later) to accompany to act as interpreter. (NOTE: COL Dr. Bounteun had expressed interest during discussions with PACAF International Health Affairs staff during a January 14-18 PACAF International Health Affairs co-organized Avian Influenza workshop in Vientiane. End Note.)

DATT Exchange

17. (SBU) BG Sisophonh asked about the possibility that the first U.S. DATT would be at the O-5 (LTC) level. He highlighted an MND regulation requiring that any Lao DATT in any country had to be at the O-6 (COL) level. The Ambassador responded that the United States has attaches at the BG level (in Moscow and Beijing) as well as at both the O-6 and O-5 level throughout the world. However, attaches from other countries in Washington, D.C. tended to be O-6 or O-7 officers. Having the Lao DATT in DC at the O-6 level seemed appropriate.

18. (SBU) The Ambassador specified that our DATT position would be created at the O-6 level. However, we were interested in having an O-5 officer as our first DATT. The Ambassador said he had a strong candidate -- an officer the Ambassador has worked with in the past. The Ambassador has great confidence that this officer will be able to work closely with MND to ensure our military-military relationship develops smoothly and comfortably. Our intention is that the subsequent DATTs would be at the rank of Colonel. BG Sisophonh said he understood the need to have personal confidence in one's colleagues and added that he personally agreed with this approach for the first U.S. DATT. BG Sisophonh added his view that the DATT exchange, first mentioned in 2000 and now possible as part of the rapid improvement in our bilateral mil-mil relationship following 25 years of cooperation on the MIA accounting issue, was a historical step forward.

COMMENT

19. (SBU) Progress in our military-military relations has proceeded quickly during the past year. Following our first mil-mil talks in January 2007 (ref a), then-COL Sisophonh participated in a Distinguished Visitors Orientation Tour to implement IMET cooperation in June. While in Washington, D.C., he told U.S. counterparts that the Government of Laos (GOL) had agreed to a long-standing U.S. request to exchange defense attaches. We have pushed the exchange during the visit of OSD-Policy Desk Officer Shubert in September (ref c), our second round of mil-mil talks in October (ref d), PACOM Admiral Keating's visit in December (ref f), and our Second U.S.-Lao Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue in January 2008 (ref h). During the year, MND has also participated in two major avian influenza training programs -- supported by MARFORPAC in August (ref b) and co-organized by PACAF International Health Affairs in January 2008 (ref g) -- opening up military medicine as a new area for cooperation. For MND to now be willing to move forward with sending students to DLI training and to welcome a DLI survey marks another significant step forward for the Lao military -- which has been more isolated from international cooperation than most other parts of the GOL. As General Sisophonh noted, finally being able to make progress on our general mil-mil relationship is clearly possible because of the past 25 years of strong bilateral cooperation on the MIA accounting process.
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